4/1/11

10:13 a.m.

Me: So, um, come out and see if we could do a study on it.

T: Oh, okay.

Me: and also help you, with…

T: The conference?

Me: I am not real sure about that, but then if you needed any help with that, I have the whole project to describe, so I can share it with you. You are kind of like my target and you are close, so that is why I wanted to do your project.

T: Oh, I’m Glad. I wasn’t sure I got that email and I was have, having palpitations. An hour [emphasis]. It was supposed to be and hour [emphasis], 45 minutes to an hour.

Me: I think it depends on the presentations. You might just be explaining something or you might be actually presenting something. I am not here to evaluate you [Inaudible sentences].

T: Oh, Okay[(laughing].

Me: Part of one of my classes for a doctoral degree, for a phase, I have to do an in-depth study of something. I am interested in digital backpacks and that is what I am studying. I am also interested in the rural setting. I am here just to get more information about what you are doing, since you are at the cutting edge [inaudible]. You didn’t know that, did you [Both laughing]?

T: Oh wow, so we did it all. Now I really feel like [laughter]).

Me: Yeah, you are kind of my target. Yeah, exactly. So, that is why I chose the project. There are very few places that are. I have read the proposal but sometimes there is a difference between what you start with and what you end up with. So I wanted to kind of..you haven’t done it yet, right?

T: Right.

Me: I wanted to talk a little bit about what you are doing. My first question will be how did you get the idea for the project?

T: Initially, when we got the STEM money, I went to my guidance counselor, who runs a girls club and I went up to him and said, “Marty, they are giving away money. Maybe you and I could come up with something that we could do with the girls, or I’d work with something that we could do with the girls and STEM, that kind of a thing. So she said, “Well, you know, Roxanne, “ because she was already doing things that were pretty neat with the Girls Club. She said, “I have money, I don’t need money, but you know one of the things that would be really great in this building is they don’t really get field trips because of the [inaudible] you know, but if we could get a grant [inaudible] graders to maybe visit a STEM business.” So that is where it started. The more we talked about it with our administrator and M J from ESC [inaudible] and, um, do more. So I went to this really cool conference about your digital backpacks. Somehow, but it’s gotta be more you know, than pictures on a field trip. It formed a life of its own and so M had suggested a project. So, I always wanted, kind of , been into environmental stuff. And I didn’t get. Last year, I taught 6th grade science, environmental science [Clears throat]. There has been a pretty strong environmental presence curriculum prior to the current [inaudible] so I was like, “Oh, I am moving up and I would like to do that again.” So that is kinda where that came from and the idea that I have is that the students identify some kind of problem around our campus, using the things on our campus. The middle school, the building next door is the high school, the next building over is the elementary. But between the buildings, we have a pond and behind the building we have approximately 80 acres of woods, a woods that goes through there.

Me: Mmmmhmm.

T: We have a setting for environmental study. It doesn’t necessarily have to be for, but one thing that sits in my mind, like Styrofoam trays in the cafeteria. Now, I don’t know if they are biodegradable. You know, it could be anything like that, paper, recycling. You know, they might want to see how effective is it. Still on a [INAUDIBLE –TECHNICAL PROBLEMS] basis. We fill it on a regular basis, but trash cans. They also have a lot of lunch room fruit drinks, plastic bottles, but we don’t have any kind of program like that. In the teacher’s lounge, same deal. I am kind of thinking that hopefully we could pick up on that. Was that they identify kind of an issue that would relate to the environment, write a proposal for a solution. I don’t know if problem is the right word for it. A problem, they would propose a way of doing it or a solution and present it. And I got that main idea from my son’s First Lego League. Are you familiar with that?

Me: Uh-uh

T: It is a robotics program where the kids work with robots and they do. It is a robotics program and the teams in are in September and February is the competition. Not only do they perform to complete with certain robots, they also have to identify a problem. This year is was biomedical. They had to identify a problem with biomedical engineering as a solution. They had to propose the solution. So, that from the first, I kinda got that idea from the first and identifying. The amazing thing is that there is a guide, it’s guided. But they really did all of it.

Me: And is that what this project is? The kids will do all of it?

T: Yes, they will identify a problem, come up with a solution and present that solution and find a way to present that solution, that is where the digital backpacks come in. They will use them in gathering the data. They will have a still camera, a digital camera and some probes to use at the pond. It dissolves oxygen with the other probes. So they will be able to gather some data and they will be able to help document what they are doing. They will have a laptop to put on all of their stuff and from that point I, I don’t know what is gonna happen [LAUGHING]. I don’t know if some kids will, like the digital part, to make their presentation or if some people with prefer a poster. I’ve got some very, very [INAUDIBLE] very comfortable with the technological aspect. We also, some sometimes our network is not reliable and sometimes they spend five minutes trying to log in. And we have yet to find out where the problem actually is so-but yeah- I want them to be comfortable with it. I want them to work in small groups. And in most of my classes, we will have six groups of four. In some classes, I am gonna have five. I have a couple classes that I am only getting six backpacks, so I am gonna have to have some [INAUDIBLE]. I plan to assign them specific roles. As far as, well, they need that because I have worked this year, with 7th graders, and last year with 6th graders, we did the same kind of stuff and still they make those kind of decisions . I may let them choose their jobs once they get their teams. And then I may have them apply prior to and organize. But it depends on who, you know, is a really good photographer and who is a general leader.

Me: And groups will be chosen by yourself?

T: No, I, I haven’t worked that out in my head exactly how to group them. They are doing an assessment today on a couple of things that we are gonna be covering. Science oriented-so, you know, I have had these kids for two years now and I know them really well. I already know that a couple of them are good at life science, so I want to see who is good at life science and spread that as much as I can. Some will need to be separated for behavior. Some kids do not have the skills. I want them to be even. I’d like to be able to have them apply for jobs. I am hoping that will just pan out nicely [LAUGHING]. Hopefully the kids will all apply for jobs evenly and we will set up six teams and they will get what they want. You know, everyone will get somebody really is strong in life science in each group. So I am still working on working that out still. That will come together. But I do plan; I kinda have to work backwards here. But, you know, I want their projects done by the last week so that they can have time to present to each other. And spring break is coming up [whisper] and in my mind I see this taking about three weeks. You know, once everything is in place. I can already tell you that I would do this differently next year. For starters, I would do it at the beginning of the year and not end with this. Because I think it is going to be a [INAUDIBLE] project.

Me: Because it is like the [INADUBLE], er?

T: Because it is like the hands-on and the kids are into something that they are going to have an interest in. And going into 7th grade, I was just following what the teacher did last year-

Me: Because it is your first year?

T: Yeah.

Me: That is an adjustment.

T: I would flip-flop it. Yeah. Besides it is so much easier in August and September. There is good weather. You know, who thought it would be April 1st and they would be wearing turtlenecks and sweatshirts? [LAUGHING]

Me: I know.

T: Just because of the kind of weather. It is so cold. We haven’t gotten. [PAUSE] A piece of it [INAUDIBLE] I am working to nail that down. That probably-hopefully it will be, it will be after testing. I just know that I cannot take them out of Language Arts and Math. I absolutely agree with that and understand. What I envision is that they will already have a lot of their research already done so they will have an opportunity to [INAUDIBLE] STEM, ask questions and have you solve problems. You know what process? Here is what we think of- and you know, let them talk about their projects. Get some feedback. I am also hoping that we can get some of those people to come maybe prior to the project or as maybe a follow up field trip. [PAUSE] I don’t know if I am talking too much.

Me: No, you’re awesome! You are already answering a lot of these questions. Are you the only teacher who is doing the project?

T: There is one other teacher’s name on the grant. She is my moral support. She says, you know, if there is anything you need me to do, from that point forward. I can, I can. The problem with the classes is that they are mixed up. There, the two classes are homeroom and then Mr. W next door to me. And after the first block they are mixed up and they no longer travel all together, so then our two homerooms then get mixed up with the other homerooms and then I have math and language arts. And that is gonna be a problem cause they are only going to be here 45 minutes a day. What I am hoping will work out as this gets underway is and after testing is to maybe pulling some kids.

Me: So there will be more flexibility.

T: I can say, “We need a kid from Mrs. D’s room. Mrs.L is a teacher, well her name is not on it, but then whatever.

Me: Do you work in a team setting?

T: There are five of us in 7th grade. I teach 4 science classes and one language arts.

After the first block, they no longer travel so our homeroom goes with the first homeroom for language arts and that is a problem because-

Me: So not everybody teaches one subject?

T: We have a language arts teacher. We have a math person who does math, and then we have a math/language arts person.

Me: Okay, she covers the rest?

T: She picks up one and I have one block of language arts. And our fifth science class gets covered by another teacher. It’s been kinda crazy this year.

Me: So the other person [INADUIBLE]?

T: [INAUDIBLE] so she has some flexibility and they have all, they’ve all said [TECHNICAL CUT OFF]. She did, she did initially.

Me: Do you have an intervention specialist?

T: I do in all of my science classes. So, I teach four science classes, so I have an intervention specialist that comes in at least part of it. They split their time between science and social studies. Usually, they are having a resource room. Or, there, the other one is working in the resource room or language arts inclusion or doing science or social studies every period in here.

Me: What do you see as his or her role in this project?

T: That is a really good question. I don’t know yet. I will be honest, which I am kinda embarrassed about.

Me: Oh, no, no.

T: But uh, it’s like oh, I’ve got-

Me: No , I [inaudible] the day before, so-

T: Both of the intervention specialists that I work with are very intuitive and they will tend to do what needs to be done. You know, if I see something, then they say something [INADUIBLE]. We really work good and I didn’t give it a second thought because they are in here doing whatever but its just- I may make them help me with all these [INADUDIBLE}.

Me: Yeah, there you go. So what I am hearing is that you are gonna make the kids be in charge of everything for the project and the specialist is going to be supporting them and you in the project.

T: Yeah, probably. That would be pretty accurate.

Me: How did you get interested in STEM?

T: When I came here, I was told that, with another teacher, that I would probably teach two classes of science and two classes of social studies along with another teacher. And another teacher will teach everything else [inaudible]. I was like [inaudible] I love it. I started teaching it. It’s great. In my undergraduate work, I did not love life science at my undergraduate work at Miami. I did not love science, I loved chemistry because I had such a great chemistry teacher because she understood that sometimes you can choose, and it’s okay, let it come to you; don’t be so hard on yourself [inaudible]. But beyond that, I didn’t have science teachers that, not even low level science teachers because at the time, one, you didn’t have to take science to graduate, but I needed it to go to college. My high school friend finds it funny that I love it so much. And it’s been [inaudible] in a lot of ways, on my own. But then I had a wonderful, wonderful post-graduate, with some great experiences. And it kind of grew out of, well, do you want a job? So that was a love. The science portion is really the most. The technology, I, I, I enjoy that about it. I learned how to use Moodle and post things on Moodle and created a course. So I am open to the idea that at some point we may be online for students for medical reasons. Um, we have the ability to get on and they won’t miss a beat and won’t be so far behind after two days of being out. So I am interested in that. I don’t know [INAUDIBLE]I guess that is probably.

Me: Awesome. Do you have a timeline for the project? Have you, when are you getting started? How is it working?

T: I’d like to get started with some pre, just some pre stuff, some introductory stuff before we get off for spring break.

Me: So like some knowledge basis stuff-

T: I’ve got a bunch of ideas that I need to organize. Part of me wants to have them write business letters to the, some local businesses. At the time, really talking about a focus on problem solving and how do you go about it. Once I work out some random issues and get outside and do some outdoor demonstrations. In the meantime, you know, we may just do some brainstorming. You know, what do you look for? What have you already experienced [inaudible]? Probably something initial, initially, so that when we bring grades, we have something to work with. And after spring break then we can start nailing down what they might wanna research. So, um, and once testing is over, then we will be back on schedule (observer sneezes twice) bless you, oh bless you. Is there another one?

Me: I think so. Nope, didn’t happen.

T: Then that is May and then I will nail down that whole, this is what we, how we wanna kind of thing.

Me: In what way is this project innovative for your district?

T: It hasn’t been a problem based project. The administrators want it, but it just been really difficult to integrate it effectively with the standards. We have not really had a lot of training. Again, it’s just one of those things where you do your own research and that’s not, that is just the way things work.

Me: So did you hear about the conference on your own?

T: Well, my principal told us about the conference asked if anybody would like to go and she wanted somebody to go. So Cindy and I went. So I think from that piece of it.

Me: Do you have a lot of teachers writing grants? I kind of think that is innovative.

T: Not hardly. The other part is, you know, we have it, we have computers. But all of our computers are donated in this district. They are not new in this district. They all work and they are free, so-

Me: Oh my gosh.

T: We get what they had before. So we are always behind. The ones we have before don’t have windows 7. I don’t have Windows 7? You know, it is fine but Windows 7 is just [inaudible]. In that stance, from that point the computers that we get will have Windows Professional. I think it will be great for the kids to have experience with upgraded programs. There has never been an effort. You know, we had a principal that came in and bought digital cameras for every grade. And we don’t have-

Me: Do you have a technology coordinator?

T: There is just no money. We have a technology coordinator, but a lot of his time is for maintenance to what we have. It is more putting out fires.

Me: So it is like more of an equipment manager, not learning support?

T: We have a part-time technology coordinator who is a little more geared toward the teaching, but she spends half of her time in the classroom, so her time is limited. So, um, that is part of what comes from working in this district. We don’t have a strong tax base, property tax and no industry, so there is not a lot of money. What money we do have is spent for the other books, the paper. Now a lot of teachers have been able to get Smart boards for their classrooms over the last few years. Part of that is parent teacher organizations and part of that has been the district buying them. But you know, the economy goes south so it will be nice to have the digital cameras and flip cameras because we are the ones that can use them. I hope that once I get the time, I can publicize it a little bit and share with other teachers. We have some pretty innovative teachers in the elementary school. You know they are doing things with their kids but they are not doing grants. They are just doing things on their own time. There are things being done that I had never heard of and you know, we just don’t toot our own horn. And even when we do, we don’t use it. So I get the technology end and the problem-based learning. I mean this is really, this is new for me too.

Me: Good. Good.

T: They’re back.

Interview ends.